

Consultative Meeting on Engaging Men and Boys In Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents

Concept Note

Venue: Mexico City, Mexico

Date: August 4-5, 2008

Inviting agency: Men Engage Alliance

Co-organizers: ECPAT International
White Ribbon Campaign
Insittuto Promundo

Background

The international community in the last 20 years has expressed an increasing concern on issues related to sexual and gender violence that have led to the development of international instruments that have served as a framework to address these issues. Three of the most relevant are the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*.

International meetings, congresses, the UN Study on Violence against children and related processes on the issue have contributed to the establishment of links between the different key stake holders involved in fighting child sexual exploitation and other forms of gender based violence. Some of these relevant events include:

- The First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation (1996), in which the demand side of CSEC began to be unveiled. After many years of focusing attention on the victims and their protection, it was agreed that further research was needed on the reasons why men seemed to be the main consumers of sex with children.
- The Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation (2001), in which efforts to promote and implement programmes and campaigns aimed at reducing the demand for sex with children, began to be systematically undertaken.

The World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents will take place in November 2008, and the Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality is scheduled for March 2009. Both international events are aimed at providing the international community with a space for renewing their commitments to fighting all forms of sexual and gender violence. These unique opportunities will allow all stakeholders to established clear and measurable commitments, assuming new challenges and designing new strategies to face the new emerging trends and the permanent features of these crimes against women and children.

Men, masculinity, sexual exploitation and sexual violence

In 2008, MenEngage Alliance and Instituto Promundo conducted secondary research for a white paper, which studied the connection between the construction of normative concepts of masculinity and sexual exploitation and violence in all its forms. The paper suggests that sexual exploitation and sexual violence must be widely recognized as a gender issue. That is, in their different forms and contexts, sexual exploitation and sexual violence are known to disproportionately involve men as perpetrators, and girls and women as victims. For example, according to ILO, in the Americas 98% of the victims of trafficking for sexual purposes are women and girl children (ILO, 2005); while another regional research found that 89% of the clients for sex with children were men, 9% women and 1% couples (ILO, 2004).

Underlying this fact are social norms related to gender and sexuality and the unequal power dynamics that these norms create and reinforce between men and women, children and adults. Historically, however, research, programs and policies related to sexual exploitation and sexual violence have focused mainly on protecting and assisting girls and women and have given relatively little attention to the importance of involving men as key allies to prevent such behaviors, and even less to contexts in which men and boys themselves are victims of sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

Sexual exploitation is a manifestation of patriarchy, in which power and control over the life of others is evident. CSEC is not an isolated practice, but part of a system of discrimination and violence, a socio-economical and political system based on mercantilism of people. The socialization of men and power relations that men establish in the patriarchy, are mechanisms for them to prevail above other groups. Around the world, boys and men are frequently raised to believe that to be “real men” they should always be strong and in control, particularly in their intimate and sexual relationships. Sexual experience, frequently associated with initiation into manhood, may be viewed by men and boys as displays of sexual competence or accomplishment, rather than acts of intimacy (Marsiglio 1988; Nzioka, 2001). Indeed, many men construct their identities and understand and affirm their masculinity through their sexuality and sexual experiences (Fracher and Kimmel 1998). In much of the world, men continue to be praised for their sexual prowess. Their sexual desire is often believed to be impulsive and uncontrollable.

At the same time, women are often expected to be demure and restrained in their sexual experiences and desire. In addition to these customs and norms which deny women sexual agency, there is the nearly global practice of using women's bodies to market consumer products and services. This commodification, or objectification, of women's bodies reinforces perceptions that women's and girls' bodies are things to be “admired and consumed” by men. Some researchers also report a growing “eroticization of young girls” by the fashion industry in which younger and younger models (12-13 years old, for example) are presented as if they were women. The contrasting norms and perceptions for men's and women's sexuality create unequal power dynamics in intimate sexual relationships and also frame the contexts of sexual exploitation and sexual violence. Adherence to non-equitable and violent hypermasculine attitudes and behaviors are linked to the perpetration of sexually exploitative acts and sexual violence.

Impact on legal framework and enforcement of the law

Little research has been carried out on how the contrasting norms and perceptions for men's and women's sexuality create unequal power and impact the elaboration and implementation of the legal framework. In not many countries, men working in the judiciary system and in law

enforcement receive sensitisation or training to ensure that myths and preconceptions based on gender are overrun, ensuring a more rights based performance.

In many countries, the age for sexual consent is lower in the case of women, reducing the protection given to them in cases when sexual violence occurs. On the other hand, in countries like Guatemala and Jamaica, laws do not award protection to boy children, identifying only girls as potential victims. In the cases of boys, the issue of sexual exploitation is often a more hidden one, surrounded by the stigma of same-sex sexual relations and stereotyped gender constructions about male roles (Atikin nd; Altamura 2007; Masud Ali 2006).

Gender norms which uphold that boys should be tough and able to defend themselves can lead “to barriers and . . . inadequate protection of boy children including a social blindness in relation to their experiences of sexual exploitation and sexual violence” (Masud Ali 2006). Likewise, boys may not report experiences of sexual exploitation and sexual violence for fear of showing any sign of weakness, or because of confusing feelings about sexual attraction and social sanctions related to homosexual behavior. In a research carried out by ECPAT in Bangladesh, where 50 boys involved in CSEC were interviewed, 68% of them had been sexually abused before becoming involved in CSEC. None of them reported this abuse (ECPAT 2006).

The perspective of most of the existing programs that target men in the prevention of CSEC, has been to focus on boys and men who are perpetrators or potential perpetrators of sexual exploitation and sexual violence. It is necessary to also reach those men, such as the police and military commanders or officials, for example, who may play strategic roles in the prevention or perpetuation of sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

Corporate social responsibility

Because masculinity and gender norms are socially constructed, our communities and social institutions tend to reinforce hegemonic patterns. Boys and girls learn what manhood and womanhood means by observing their families, where they often see women and girls providing care-giving for children, while men are often outside the family setting working. They also observe and internalize broader social norms, including messages from television, mass media and from which toys or games are considered appropriate for boys or girls. Bearing this in mind, the media and certain industries such as the fashion industry, are playing a key role on the increasing sexualization of children and the idealization of gender violence.

Therefore, it is important to develop sensitization programs for the media and other key private sector groups in order to support and encourage internal regulations and minimum standards to ensure that their services and products are not having a negative impact on the community. These type of initiatives require multi-sector coordination, including the government to reinforce the need, the companies in development and implementation, and the civil society in providing support.

Impact on multi-sector coordination and partnership collaboration

The last 15 years have witnessed a significant increase in attention to engaging men and boys in efforts to promote greater gender equality. This response is largely the result of a better understanding of men's roles in determining women's health and well-being, and the realization that many health development efforts for women and girls do not address gender-based values and norms.

Such programs must also question their own beliefs and stereotypes about men themselves, especially care services that should also take into consideration special requirements male victims of CSEC may have. Also, awareness raising campaigns to prevent all forms of CSEC and sexual violence are largely targeted to girl children, ignoring the possibility of boys being victimized. Furthermore, there is very limited work that has been carried out directly with boys and men who use or have used sexual exploitation and sexual violence. Most of the attention to these boys and men has been focused on the implementation of punitive measures as a strategy for inhibiting, if not changing, their behaviors and practices.

There is a need to ensure that programs for the prevention of sexual exploitation and sexual violence consistently incorporate broader messages and reflections about masculinity and gender inequalities and, furthermore, that they undergo impact evaluations to assess their effectiveness in changing attitudes and behaviors. Likewise, programs that work with men on other issues, including sexual and reproductive health and maternal and child health should also be sure to address links to gender based violence, including sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

These types of programs should target younger and younger children and should have certain continuity, in order to consolidate as public policies on education and sexual and reproductive health, impacting and achieving a lasting positive social change. This requires greater coordination between governments, schools and NGOs in order to design and implement these programs effectively. However, it is also important to recognize that in some countries it is not easy to address or talk about sexuality issues and is very difficult to challenge social and cultural patterns.

International cooperation

In addition to including a more comprehensive gender approach to programs, specially those targeting boys and men, there is also a need for distilling methodologies and lessons learned from successful programs implemented around the world that could be adapted and applied in other contexts and with diverse groups of boys and men, as well as with other stakeholders.

In particular, if we seek to have a significant impact on rates of sexual exploitation and sexual violence across the globe, it is necessary to move beyond a few small-scale interventions by identifying possibilities for scaling-up successful programs and campaigns regionally and globally. Governments should play a key role in ensuring implementation of national programs, based on the leanings and expertise of the civil society.

Objectives of the Consultative Meeting

General Objective

The main aim of this Consultation is to identify and prioritize an action agenda for engaging men and boys in combating sexual exploitation and violence against children. Conceptual and practical tools already developed, which promote critical reflection on masculinity founded on equity and human rights, as well as the White Paper developed by MenEngage will serve as a base for generating the exchange among actors who will consider how to extend work to address and actively engage men and boys in the prevention of sexual exploitation and sexual violence against children.

This opportunity for reflection and exchange of experiences, lessons learned and challenges faced will contribute invaluable learning for the World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children, in which conceptual tools and strategies to combat CSEC globally in coming years will be redefined and adjusted and where consideration of the outcomes of discussions on the White Paper developed by MenEngage can lead to integration of work efforts to systematically engage men in counteraction.

Specific Objectives

- Share the key findings of the White Paper and undertake a critical discussion on the contents with key stakeholders working against sexual exploitation and violence.
- Discuss state of the knowledge on the elements that shape the social construction of men and boys' attitudes and behaviors in relation to sexuality and their attitudes toward sexual exploitation and sexual violence against children.
- Share experiences and lessons learned in order to allow for the identification of replicable programmes for engaging men and boys in ending sexual exploitation and violence against children.
- Development of a strong partnership between MenEngage, ECPAT International and other relevant stakeholders for collaborative action.
- Outline a proposal for action at regional and global level that can guide the development of national strategies to engage men and boys in combating sexual exploitation and violence against children, which could be shared for the World Congress III.
- Define a common agenda, with clear goals, specific lines of action by key actors who can take responsibility for follow up on action in within an agreed timeframe.
- Provide input to the Engaging Boys and Men in Gender Equality Global Symposium, March 2009

Expected results

- A Memorandum of Understanding between MenEngage, ECPAT International and other interested partners, in order to establish a framework for joint action and exchange for the development of programmes and projects for addressing the commercial sexual exploitation of children.
- A global plan of action outlining priority actions and strategies to combat the sexual exploitation of children. These would include the incorporation of messages, reflective processes and actions that can transform the patterns of masculinity that foster sexual exploitation and violence and reinforce gender inequalities shifting the focus toward actively engagement of men and boys as key allies.
- A final report from the Consultation Meeting, compiling the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the meeting as an input to the World Congress III against the Sexual Exploitation of Children. The document will highlight strategies that can be adapted by the governments and other key stakeholders with the aim of integrating them in public policy in order to ensure sustainable action.

Interested stakeholders

MenEngage is a global alliance that seeks to engage boys and men to achieve gender equality. The Alliance came together in 2004 with the goal of working in partnership to promote

the engagement of men and boys in achieving gender equality, promoting health and reducing violence at the global level, including questioning the structural barriers to gender inequalities. The MenEngage partners work collectively and individually toward the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those components that focus on achieving gender equality. The Alliance's work is informed by and seeks to achieve the goals set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Activities of the alliance include information-sharing, joint training activities and national level and international level advocacy. Steering Committee Members include Promundo (co-chair), EngenderHealth (co-chair), the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Family Violence Prevention Fund, International Center for Research on Women, WHO, UNFPA, UNDP, Sonke Gender Justice Project, Save the Children-Sweden, Sahoyog, and the White Ribbon Campaign.

For more information, see www.menengage.org

Promundo is a Brazilian NGO with international reach that seeks to promote gender equality, achieve sexual and reproductive rights and reduce violence against women, children and youth. Promundo works to: (1) research innovative ideas that have the potential to achieve positive social change; (2) apply these ideas in pilot initiatives in partnership with community groups; and (3) disseminate the results of applied research to organizations, governments and multilateral institutions that are well-placed to continue, expand and replicate these initiatives in the long-term.

For more information, see www.promundo.org.br

ECPAT International works to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Its work involves action research, legal reform initiatives, critical education and the monitoring implementation of commitments by States to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children. ECPAT is a global network of organisations and individuals, which includes 80 member groups in 74 countries, an International Board and a Secretariat in Bangkok, Thailand. ECPAT groups are involved in implementation of various initiatives to protect children at local level, such as advocacy, support and care of victims, mobilization and organization of youth as actors in shaping policies for their protection as well as a number of initiatives with private sector and other stakeholders whose structures and or services impact on the protection of children. ECPAT International has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). With 17 years of experience, Governments and NGOs worldwide recognise ECPAT International as the leading international NGO network dedicated to the fight against CSEC and advocate for child rights.

For more information, see www.ecpat.net